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ABSTRACT

The grading system for technical practicums in theatre at California State University, San Bernandino uses an evaluation form completed by each student's practicum supervisor. The evaluation form gives concrete evidence that there are viable criteria for grading practicums, and also helps if a student wishes to challenge his or her grade. Usually upon seeing the completed form and receiving verbal explanation of it, the student realizes that care was taken in determining the grade. The evaluation form has ten-point scales in the areas of (1) initiative, (2) attitude toward work and willingness to learn, (3) attitude toward co-workers and supervisor, (4) growth based on ability and potential, (5) responsibility for completing the work assigned, (6) dependability, and (7) overall. Number of hours completed and whether the student attended striking of a stage set are also considered. The 10-point scale translates to a letter-grade scale, ranging from A through D with pluses and minuses. Making this grading policy effective requires consistency. Students may also fill out the evaluation form themselves. This form can be modified for grading Acting Practicums, if they are optional or required only for majors. (A copy of the evaluation form is included.) (HTH)

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# ALTERNATIVE METHODS

# TO PRACTICUM GRADING

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There are many ways that practicums are used in college/university education, as they came about for a variety of reasons. The three primary reasons are:

1) To give faculty teaching credits for work they were doing when release time or assigned time was unavailable.

2) To give students a practical experience; to put to use the theories and creative ideas that they learn in the classroom; as a reinforcement of classroom teaching.

3) To recognize student efforts; to give students credit for work they volunteered to do.

Regardless of their origins, practicums can work to your great advantage and still be the learning experience we desire them to be. Grades become necessary to make the courses academically viable and sellable to the college community.

A number of institutions allow practicums to be graded on a Credit/No Credit or Pass/Fail basis. If yours is one, consider yourself lucky. However, if you fall into the other category and must assign a letter grade, or worse yet, are on the +/- system, you must have a set of ground rules for grading before the students begin working. Grading practicums, while always subjective, becomes less so with several givens.

1) Good supervision.

2) Emphasis on the learning situation or teaching, not on getting the show built.

3) Consistent grading policies from quarter to quarter, year to year, instructor to instructor.

4) Give the students credit for having intelligence and let them use it. Allow them to assume a measure of responsibility, to complete a project, and show another student what they just learned; this is especially helpful since it reinforces the first student's knowledge.

My experience lies in supervising and grading technical practicums. But, in speaking with acting and administrative supervisors, I found we

share many of the same concerns.

The grading system for technical practicums that we use at CSUSB is a little complex. An evaluation form for each student is completed by their supervisor at the end of the quarter. (See attachment.) The supervisor--in our case a staff member--fills out an evaluation form for each student in their shop and adds any comments they feel appropriate. This is usually done in discussion with the faculty member ultimately responsible for the grade. We found the best way is for all faculty and supervisors (designers included) involved with grading each quarter to sit down together and go over each student individually. While I may not be teaching the Introduction to Theatre course that quarter, I do spend a fair amount of time in each shop so I may have some knowledge about those students that no one else has. Often they end up under my supervision, as well as the shop foreman's or the costumer's.

The evaluation form is one method; it gives concrete evidence that there are viable criteria for grading practicums. They also help if a student wishes to challenge the grade given him. Usually upon seeing the completed form and receiving a verbal explanation of it, the student realizes that care really was taken in determining his grade. (It is also a good idea to show each student the form before work begins.)

The evaluation form is fairly self-explanatory, but let me share some of our concerns in developing it. The first area, and to us one of the most important, is initiative (#1). Here we look to see whether a student when finished with a project seeks another or do they sit down and wait for you to notice them. Do they offer help to others who can use it, especially if you are busy?

The next two categories relate to attitude. Originally this was one,

but in discussion it became clear that a separation was needed between attitude towards one's work (#2) and towards one's co-workers (#3). Attitude towards work encompasses a willingness to learn, a commitment to the work, and care about the overall show, not just their grade. Attitude towards one's co-workers includes how well they work with others; attitude towards the supervisor includes how well they take direction.

Growth (#4) is based on the student's ability at the beginning of the quarter. Those who have prior knowledge about how the shop is run or how to use tools are expected to use their know-how. The growth of the individual is not compared to others, but o their own potential. Responsibility (#5) goes hand-in-hand with growth. If a student has very little experience, or lacks understanding, we don't expect them to take charge, but we do expect them to complete work assigned to them. If they have a measure of experience, or greater potential for understanding, we expect them to lead others, work well with others, in addition to completing assigned tasks. Do they ask questions and try difficult problems? Another very important thing we consider is are they prepared to redo their mistakes?

With dependability (#6) our primary concerns are with promptness: Did the student work the scheduled hours, or did he/she come and go as they please? Did the student complete the required hours and did they complete individually assigned tasks? The last category (#7) is for an overall impression of the student's work in the shop. This one is often a rough average of the other six evaluation areas.

Two other very important things are taken into consideration with technical practicums. The first is whether or not the student completed the hours required (#9). This is important since the rest of the evaluation form in no way reflects this. The evaluation, with the exception of depend-

ability, is solely based on the work completed. The final grade is arrived at based on total number of hours worked (more, less, or exact) and the evaluation of the time they put in. We also require our students to attend strike, so there is a place (#8) on the form to indicate this.

Looking at this form is a scale from 10-1. Since we are on the +/- grading system, our scale roughly translates to this:

| 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | A- | B+ | B | B- | C+ | C | C- | D+ | D |

It is extremely rare that we need to use the low end of the scale, so do not include a 0 for an F.

We do not stop however with filling out the form and discussing each student. The final thing we do is rank the students by number or grade to see how they fit together.

| 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alice | Mary | Pat | Bill | Liz | Shelly | | | | |
| | Mike | Bob | Greg | | | | | | |
| | | Gil | Jeff | | | | | | |
| | John | | | | | | | | |
| | Dave | | | | | | | | |

Sometimes we see that while Mary has an overall of 9 and John has an 8½, that we really think their grades should be the same. Or if two students end up with the same ranking, but we feel one had a better attitude than the other, we will adjust accordingly.

To make this or any grading policy effective you must be consistent. It is also a good idea to inform the student of your policy before work begins. Show them the evaluation form. Also, let them know who will be doing the grading if indeed it is someone else. Our supervisors recommend grades or a ranking; it is the faculty's responsibility to actually assign the grades. This is the main reason we use a numbered scale on the evaluation form. I have been known to disagree with the supervisor's reports

and go against them. If the faculty member is not the one doing the supervising, it is quite helpful if he/she takes a daily "walk" through the shops to observe the atmosphere and students' attitudes.

You might try having each student evaluate his/herself; oftentimes they are harder than you would be. Use the same form you will be evaluating them with, or create a new one.

Acting Practicums: I don't grade acting practicums, so I discussed with our acting faculty what they do. Essentially they are philosophically in line with the technical practicums, but in practice are very far apart. While they are concerned with the growth and learning of the students, the grades do not always reflect this. The A's, A-'s and B+'s are usually the case. Their dilemma lies in the fact that any student in one of our productions is required to take the practicum. Walk-ons and major roles get the same number of units of credit. Our acting and technical practicums are what provide the necessary FTE for faculty to direct and design without teaching three to four courses in addition. Release or assigned time is unheard of for productions.

Directing faculty have been known to give grades other than A's, A-'s and B+'s, but these are the extreme cases--discipline, attitude, dependability problems. A Pass/Fail system would be best in this case. Also if you rely on non-majors to be in your shows and you are known to grade hard, who wants to put all that time and energy into a show and get a C at the end?

But if your Acting Practicums are optional or required only for the major, a grading system similar to the one we use for technical practicums can be set. Just determine your criteria beforehand and inform the students what their grades will be based on. The evaluation form we use can be

easily adapted to the area of acting. A few suggestions follow.

Initiative: Do they give input to the rehearsal process, come up with business?

Attitude towards work: Are they so upset they didn't get the lead that it causes disruption?

Attitude towards other actors/director:

Growth as an actor:

Responsibility: Did they learn their lines on time?

Dependability: Promptness to rehearsals.

Decide what is important for you to teach the actors and what you expect from them.

In summary let me say that <u>consistency</u> throughout the process is the KEY. Good supervision and a friendly atmosphere make for a better learning experience for students as well as for faculty/supervisors.

CREW EVALUATION FORM

NAME _____ CLASS _____

SUPERVISOR _____ DATE _____

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) | Initiative | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2) | Attitude towards work<br>willingness to learn<br>commitment to work | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3) | Attitude towards co-workers | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| | " " supervisor | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4) | Growth<br>based on ability and potential | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5) | Responsibility<br>complete work assigned | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6) | Dependability<br>promptness<br>complete time<br>complete assigned work | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7) | Overall | 10 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8) | Attended Strike | | | yes | | | no | | | | |
| 9) | Hours Completed | | | _____ | | | | | | | |

Comments:

Supervisor's Signature _____